

AMHERST HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2011

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) is pleased to inform readers of some of the issues and activities which confronted the members on several fronts in *preserving our citizens' rights* in the Amherst community.

The South Sudan, a new country finally, as the North tyranny which caused a split, was continually in our concerns to monitor with a Commissioner colleague from the Sudan with family and friends to worry about. Our connection via collaboration with Amnesty International therefore was extant.

Another of our initial issues was to prepare for a town warrant re: Transgender Rights / Resolution promoted by the Stonewall Center at UMass with Dr. Genny Beemyn making a presentation to the Commission. This was state supported in November making it unnecessary for the town to proceed forward – the issue considered moot.

The December 10 Vigil on the Common was memorably vibrant, in the cold, a dozen or so participants sharing the reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The related Annual Human Rights Forum was held in Town Hall the immediate following Saturday, celebrating the progress of the *Haiti Focused Initiative* with Dr. Sandy Muspratt, Tahina Vatel and Meg Holladay presenting the video and slide revelations of the issues for 65 students being educated by a handful of dedicated teachers needing books and supplies to meet the necessary mission in St. Mattieu, Bayonaisse. This effort continues with the idea of being catalytic for any local groups to support or contribute in any way. We will hope to have Mr. Young from NE Amnesty International speak at a future occasion on human rights since he had a conflict for this event. The Director and Chair presented the Select Board with the impending activity at an earlier regular meeting of the SB. A Town Proclamation with signatures was issued.

Our global concerns included the August execution of Troy Davis concluding his death row status of the 1991 killing of police officer Mark McPhail. 7 Of 9 witnesses recanted their testimony with no physical evidence linking of Davis to the crime.

Our efforts to form a Town-wide January celebration “ Reclaiming the Dream” of Dr. Martin Luther King failed due to the late-starting of planning, reserving facilities and to initiate PR to inform and prepare the community on the heels of the preeminent, 28th Annual MLK celebration at the Middle School.

Our attempt to have a recruitment ad placed in the Bulletin was created and submitted but was never run which was a crucial disappointment to the effort. Future attempts will continue.

Our December, anticipated Holiday Celebration, *sans quorum*, resulted in a brainstorming session which was very productive setting our sights on a program issues to work on. WIGGIO was of interest in a thought to tie in families over a series of vents toward important health issues, community events and better communications. Other ideas; International Cultural Day, Ramadan Emphasis Day, Local Issues Forum, Family Health Walk, Facebook Page, ACLU:

Know Your Rights, APD Partnering/ Collaboration. The aforementioned items to be reviewed during our Fall Retreat to establish priorities and implementation.

Memorial services were noteworthy for Mary Wyatt and Richard Yarde, important area icons. Also, was the passing of a human rights lawyer, activist, Asian jurist, Bahai, Abdelfattah Amor, a religious advocate. We mourn his passing as his faithfuls continue to be slain and persecuted in Iran, particularly.

Mr. Morales made a complaint to the Commission re: the school system suggesting a backward trend of education in the system. A collaborative effort with more specific facts and figures was suggested for a return presentation.

A presentation of a collaborative with AFSC, MA ACLU, Bill of Rights Defense Committee was made seeking our support for enforcing and strengthening of civil rights in Amherst via the Secure Communities Program. Ruth Hook and Nancy Talanian were prime movers in this Town article with Jeff Napolitano and Emily Ogders important promoters - ultimately passing by Town Meeting (Article 29) resulting in a no-cooperation of undocumented immigrant information with the FBI.

A Blogspot idea was discussed and Commissioner Anderson presented a working design yet to be fully implemented. Concurrently, a HRC brochure of our mission and projections is in a draft form.

A *'no quorum'* for February was particularly disappointing with discussion critical in the continued development of the Amherst Affirmative Action Policy.

Importantly, an Amherst Media interview / presentation by the Chair and Director Torres, reviewed for the community, the critical nature of the town-mandated presence of the Commission and its impact on the community. Ms Torres took an early retirement in March and will be sorely missed.

The Chair and a former Commissioner, Rafael Lopez appeared on Frank Gatti's (another former Commissioner) WMUA "FOCUS", radio program (5/6/12) discussing the HRC importance and Eunice Torres' impact during her directorship tenure. We discussed the need to recruit student and adults and a new concept; Advocate/Supporter initiative of volunteers with non-commissioner status giving varied short-term expertise valuable to the Commission. Two (2) persons have been recruited to date with a third having expressed interest at this writing.

The Mill River, Annual Amherst Gathering occurred in spite of the predicted rain. The appreciated assistance of Kay Zlogar, Fire Dept., Pot-Luck sponsors and devotees of the food contributed to the success of the young Heroism scholars: Eva Katsoulakis with Kabir Narayanan, Josh DolanGerber, Clvanna Elgadi and Shayna Goss. The Elder Lifetime Citizen's Awardees were Robert Romer (event speaker) and Eunice Torres who was unable to be present - the Chair accepted the award with nominator, Frank Gatti. The HRC was grateful for the attendance of Town Manager, Musante and Fire Chief, Nelson amid the parents, families and nominators numbering ~ 40 totally.

Memorialized persons noted were; Stephen Puffer, Mary Wyatt, Troy Davis and Travon Martin.

The Chair volunteered for the Human Resources / Human Rights Screening Committee to select a candidate, from an applicant pool, to fill Eunice's Human Rights Director position and that of Human Resources. This was completed and Deborah Radway will begin in July.

Thank you for taking the time to review the accomplishments *and disappointments* of a most diverse committee of the Town attempting to meet the needs to preserve the civil and human rights you and your fellow citizens deserve and command.

Respectfully submitted,

Reynolds B. Winslow
Amherst Human Rights Commission; Chair